

Kyodan

Kyodan News Letter

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN JAPAN

CHRISTIAN CENTER

2,4 CHOME, GINZA, CHUO KU, TOKYO, JAPAN

Cable Address Japankyodan Tokyo Telephone 561:6131

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TO WRESTLE WITH THE PROBLEMS OF OUR TIMES

A mission to modern society that will involve deep penetration into basic social problems and a greater flow of persons and ideas back and forth across national boundaries is anticipated in results of the Consultation on Christian Confrontation with Modern Society, February 11-15. Representatives of the Kyodan, schools, social work, and overseas churches participated in the conference, which was sponsored by the Council of Cooperation.

The Consultation opened February 11 in the Shinagawa Community Center-- a concrete example (literally) of one church's response to the impingement of modern society on its neighborhood. Pastor Yoichiro Saeki, Shinagawa Church, described the "pre-urban" society of the surrounding inner city. Mr. Saeki said, "Urbanization does not take place until the community is re-formed. The basis of this re-formation must be not merely the fact of people living in the same location but people coming together to bear one another's burdens."

TROUBLED MODERN SOCIETY

Two lecturers gave their analyses of modern society. Prof. Junichi Kyogoku, Tokyo University, focussed on "alienation" as the key to many of Japan's problems. Dr. Everett Kleinjans, Chancellor, East-West Center, Hawaii, spoke of the frustration and violence that characterize American life today, in spite of the nation's economic, educational, technological and legal achievements. He attributed many of the current problems to the explosions of population, knowledge and communication.

A part of the Consultation consisted of reports from participating groups. Kyodan Vice Moderator Kiyoshi Ii emphasized the Kyodan's stripping down of its national staff and strengthening of districts, and the Kyodan's positive step into the arena of contemporary issues with its merger with the United Church of Christ in Okinawa.

The precarious position of Christian schools was dramatized by the absence of several school administrators due to disturbances on their campuses. IBC-related School Council President Jiro Shimizu cited the long and notable history of Christian schools, and the appreciated help of overseas churches in terms of missionaries and funds. He expressed the schools' wish that this might continue in view of the extremely critical current situation.

Social Work League spokesman Shiro Abe referred to the movement of Japan toward a welfare state, contrasting the major role of private institutions in a welfare state with their negligible role in a socialist state. If Christian work is to play a vital role in pioneering, pilot projects, practice, and criticism, financial help must continue, Abe told Consultation members.

Speaking for the Interboard Committee for Christian Work in Japan, Chairman Charles Germany stressed that world needs for mission monies and personnel mean that in Japan priority must be given to the most strategic projects.

Most significant among the Consultations' two sets of recommendations may be the call to "re-think education from the new perspective of mission in the modern world." It asks specifically for 1) a research project on education to be conducted by people from Christian schools, the Kyodan, the missionary community and from outside these groups; 2) an exchange of students and professors between Japan and North America to grapple with common problems in education, international politics, and socio-politics; 3) mutual acceptance of each other's representatives, within their respective structures, by the Kyodan and the Schools Council; and 4) cooperation with groups not structurally a part of the church, such as the Association of Christian University Teachers and the Education Association of Christian Schools.

A second set of recommendations calls for a review of the present CoC structure and recommendations for "a new cooperative structure appropriate for mission in modern society." Also recommended are studies of internationalization of mission efforts and the establishment of a personnel committee; pioneering in new types of missionary assignments; cooperation between North America and Japan in struggling with such mutual concerns as the China problem, reversion of Okinawa, non-violence; and experimentation in joint research and planning for Christian mission in a rapidly changing world. Stronger relationships between the Kyodan and the Social Work League, and between the Social Work League and the Schools Council will also be studied.

Kyodan Moderator Masahisa Suzuki, chairman of the CoC, noted three points about this Consultation. "First," he said, "we talked very frankly. Second, while we recognize that education is a very big problem, at least we are beginning to have some perspective on it. Third, IBC and CoC, which have been very narrow channels, are beginning to widen their vision."

"There was a new sense of urgency evident in this Consultation," Suzuki said. "Events are forcing us to make decisions and to act."

IN BOLIVIA

On March 2 the Argentina Maru will sail from Yokohama with 150 families aboard, immigrants to Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia. Among the passengers will be Rev. Toru Kubo, his wife Ryoko, and their daughters, ages 2 and 5, who are not immigrants but missionaries, headed for the San Juan Colony in Bolivia, where they will take up the evangelism, education and community service carried on for the past five years by Kyodan missionary Kunichi Hanamori.

Among Kubo's special qualifications for his new assignment is that of being a dokenjin--a person from the same province--with the more than half of San Juan's 250 Japanese families who are from Nagasaki prefecture. Born and raised in Nagasaki, Kubo studied sociology at Meiji Gakuin University, was graduated from Japan Biblical Seminary in Tokyo, and returned to Nagasaki where he has been pastor of Omura Church for the past eight years. Experience as dean and instructor of sociology and social ethics at Chinzei High School and University and lecturing at an Omura nurses' school have given Kubo a good background for the varied tasks of adult education, kindergarten supervision, church life and community service that mission in the colony requires. At the same time, the pull of nearby Santa Cruz City felt by San Juan sons and daughters points to emerging

new social needs that must be met.

Mrs. Kubo, a graduate of Seiwa College for Christian Workers in Nishinomiya and a licensed Kyodan director of Christian education, will teach classes for girls and women.

To prepare for his work, Kubo is attending an orientation course for immigrants to South America sponsored by the government in Japan as well as studying English and Spanish.

San Juan Church, which the Kubos will serve, is a Bolivian Methodist Church. Providing their support are the Swiss Methodist Church, the United Methodist Church and the Kyodan. With such an international backing, Kubo voices anticipation at the opportunity to work with Bolivian pastors, with Rev. Katsumi Yamahata, Japanese missionary assigned to the nearby colony of Okinawan immigrants, and with missionaries from other countries in a cooperative approach to mission in the region.

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"The crisis in Christian education must be seen in the total context of education. If the university system--which the radicals are trying to destroy and the government is trying to preserve--is totally destroyed, then destruction of the Christian schools is inevitable. The only possibility is to use pressures from inside and outside to reform the system not just for the sake of survival but for orientation for the future."

"Tokyo University reveals the basic spiritual and intellectual dilemma of our times. It is symbolic of the decline of a total society which has been superficially prosperous when a small group can 'shake the foundations' and no one fundamentally disagrees or regrets it. The university is the softest point in the whole system, and the students' strength lies in the fact that they can articulate the weakness."

Kentaro Shiozuki, WSCF Secretary
for University Teachers Work in Asia,
participating, as observer, in CoC
Consultation

